

April 2005

Op Ed -- Succes de Scandale: Reaction to I, User

Robert Behra

University of Utah, robert.behra@library.utah.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Behra, Robert (2005) "Op Ed -- Succes de Scandale: Reaction to I, User," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 2, Article 14.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4795>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Op Ed — Succès de Scandale: Reaction to I, User

by **Robert Behra** (Science and Engineering Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, 295 South 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0860; Phone: 801-581-7533) <robert.behra@library.utah.edu>

As a conversation starter the piece in your last issue by **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer** ("I, User — Just Say No: Eliminating Low-Value Tasks") must be judged a succès de scandale. The authors no doubt anticipated heated responses on the part of their readers and they won't be disappointed. Many of the two dozen suggestions they make seem likely to further erode both the quality of service provided to our patrons and the image those patrons have of libraries and the people who operate them. Among the more alarming:

1) **"stop item by item book selection"** — taken to its logical conclusion this would obviate the need to hire subject specialists, leaving the task of collection development to **Baker and Taylor, Blackwell**, etc. In addition to giving these companies inordinate power over the content of collections, such a move would make it almost impossible for titles published by smaller companies (or individuals) to reach libraries, especially considering that another of the authors' suggestions is for libraries to stop accepting gifts.

2) **"stop putting new books out for review"** — by this, do they mean eliminating the practice of allowing patrons to see the newest acquisitions before they are integrated into the collection? If so, they would probably also argue against maintaining a list of new arrivals that can be viewed by patrons on paper (or even online), since it too involves extra work. Allowing patrons to review a library's newest acquisitions in one place makes it possible for them to see how at least some of the acquisitions budget is being spent — it could be likened to the various state and federal Open Meetings laws — and doing away with New Books shelves could be perceived by the public as an attempt by a library to avoid accountability.

3) **"stop periodical check-in, at least for some categories of material"** — I am regularly asked by patrons whether we have received the latest issue of this or that title that wasn't in its assigned place on the current peri-


odicals shelves, and the only way to answer such questions is to refer to check-in records. If a library stops keeping check-in records how can it possibly claim issues that were never received? Perhaps the authors believe that libraries should not bother claiming missing issues?

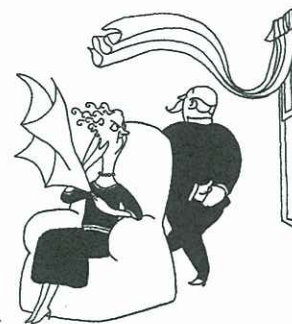
4) **"stop binding journals"** — binding journals is the best way to guarantee their long-term availability, preservation and usefulness. Not all journals are currently available online, and even if they were, very few (if any) libraries could afford the added expense to get all of their paper-based subscriptions electronically.

There has already been mass movement away from paper towards electronic-only subscriptions, which often

results in gaps in holdings when

a library finds itself no longer able to afford the subscription and therefore loses access to both current and past issues online. Until the questions of the permanency of electronic formats and ongoing access to purchased back-runs of journals are satisfactorily resolved, libraries would be shooting themselves in the foot by discontinuing the binding of serials.

The future towards which the authors want us to move sounds like one that will be controlled not by librarians but by corporations, one in which the patrons will have no say and one in which all decisions will be made based solely on the short-term bottom line, with no consideration for long-term consequences. 



IT'S TRUE!!!!!!

Fiction Contest in Against the Grain

\$250 prize

*How many of you are working on the
Great American Novel, Short Stories, Poetry?*

Here's your chance to get into print and reach thousands of readers starved for fiction that tells the story of libraries and librarians, publishing and bookselling, but we're open to any original works—your imagination is the limit.

A fiction page will become a regular feature of *ATG* after this contest, so sharpen your pencils and tell us your story.

Deadline for entries
is August 15, 2005.



ATG LAUNCHING NEW FICTION PAGE